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PRATT & LETCHWORTH COMPANY
INCORPORATED

Personal copy W.F. Saunders

A HISTORY OF

THE PRATT & LETCHWORTH COMPANY, INC.

1848 - 1943

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By William F. Saunders

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BUFFALO, N. Y.

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By William F. Saunders

One of the first basic industries to influence the growth of Buffalo as a commercial and manufacturing center was the iron and steel industry. With the exception of the Aircraft industry, the manufacture of iron and steel now ranks with the railroads in economic importance. Because of the ever existent close relationship between the railroads and the durable goods industry, one could not have grown to such proportions without the other.

History records much of interest concerning the pioneers who developed this industry and built the first iron furnaces on the Niagara Frontier. Probably one of the most colorful episodes in the commercial history of Buffalo in the past century is the story of the old Pratt & Letchworth enterprises and the successive development of one of the oldest foundry concerns in the world.

THE FIRST PRATT ENTERPRISE

From a paper presented to the Buffalo Historical Society on March 10th, 1873, by the later William Pryor Letchworth, many interesting incidents relating to the antecedent history of the Pratt family were revealed.

The name Pratt is derived from the Latin work "Pratum" meaning a meadow; its etymology being referred to in the ancient motto "Rident Florentia Prata", or "The Flourishing Meadows Smile", found in the emblazonry of Pratt of Ryston Hall, Norfolk, England. The name extends back into French

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

and English history to the year 1066. Members of the illustrious De Prattelles family fought with William The Conqueror, and in the First Crusade were companions of Richard Coeur De Lion.

Many centuries later a direct descendant of this family, the Rev. William Pratt, of Norfolk County, England, sent his son John to America with some of the early English settlers. Since the first Pratt set foot in the New World, a great many of his descendants have figured prominently in the early history of the Niagara Frontier. A grandson of John Pratt died in Buffalo in 1806. His descendant Aaron Pratt was the father of Captain Samuel Pratt. Captain Pratt won distinction as a soldier in the Revolutionary War. Upon his return to Buffalo in 1804, he set up a trading post which was one of the principal rendezvous for the Indians. It is said that Captain Pratt subsequently erected the first frame house in Buffalo and was one of the first to introduce public worship in the city.

The Captain died in 1812 just prior to the burning of the village of Buffalo. His only son, Samuel Pratt, Jr., figured prominently in civic affairs, being at one time an adjutant to General Porter and later a Sheriff of Niagara County.

Subsequent years saw many other members of the family distinguishing themselves in various interests. Hiram, a son of Captain Pratt became the second Mayor of the City of Buffalo. He was a founder of the Bank of Buffalo and a builder of some of the earliest Great Lake Steamers.

Samuel Fletcher Pratt, who was the son of Samuel Pratt, Jr., as a young man went to Canada to work as a clerk in a store. In 1822 he returned and entered the hardware shop of his cousins, George and Thaddeus Weed. Their business grew rapidly and in 1831 it became known as Weed and Pratt. On March 21, 1836, Mr. Pratt bought out the Weed interests and for about six years conducted a small hardware store of his own. He then took his younger brother, Pascal Paoli Pratt, into partnership and together they

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

erected living quarters and a store at 44-50 Terrace Street in downtown Buffalo. It was known as the S. F. Pratt and Company. In 1846 Edward P. Beals became a junior partner in the firm and the name was changed to Pratt & Company.

The early business of Pratt & Company consisted mainly of an extensive variety of materials. They were importers and dealers in hardware and metals. Their products included bar iron, sheet iron, railroad and contractor supplies, wire, farming implements, coach and saddlery ware, and mechanics' tools.

The trade of the house embraced almost all sections of the then sparsely populated country east of the Mississippi. The house of Pratt & Company ranked second in the country as regards volume of iron trade and amount of business transacted and was considered the largest hardware store in the world at that time. The original buildings are still standing and are now occupied by the Beals, McCarthy and Rogers wholesale and retail hardware store. (Demolished 1952 for new N.Y.C. Underpass and N.Y.S. Thruway—)

THE PRATT & LETCHWORTH PARTNERSHIP

The growth of early Buffalo and the migration of settlers to the west created an increasing demand for hardware, particularly for hames, saddlery, and carriage fixtures. The volume of business for this class of merchandise prompted Pratt & Company to enter into the direct manufacture of these articles and an immediate spurt in business resulted. Quite frequently at this time Pascal P. Pratt conducted wagon trains of freight from New York to Buffalo. It was through his visits to New York that he met and became acquainted with William Pryor Letchworth, whom he persuaded to come to Buffalo in October, 1848, at the age of 25, to work with him.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

William Pryor Letchworth was the son of Josiah Letchworth, Sr., and was born in Brownsville, New York, in 1823. He was a direct descendant of the Letchworths of Chesterton and Letchworth Village, England, who were exponents of charity and amoung the originators of the Society of Friends.

William P. Letchworth received a meagre early education which was derived mostly from parental training. A plot to run away from home at the age of fifteen, was frustrated by his father and he went to work with the firm of Hayden and Holmes of Auburn, New York. This firm was engaged in the manufacture and sale of saddlery hardware and employed convict labor in the prison shops at Auburn thru arrangement with the State.

For several years as an apprentice, Mr. Letchworth received the grand sum of forty dollars a year and his board. The young man's initiative eventually brought him promotion to a position of importance with the same firm in New York City.

A partnership was formed in October, 1848, and became known as Pratt & Letchworth. The associates were Samuel F. Pratt, Pascal P. Pratt and William P. Letchworth. The new establishment manufactured and dealt soley with saddlery and carriage hardware and was organized as a separate and distinct business from the hardware store of Pratt and Company.

A small shop was erected at 165 Main Street, not far from the Old Erie County Penitentiary in Buffalo. This became the first Pratt & Letchworth enterprise and was the forerunner of the world's largest hame and saddlery factory. It was the nucleus of what was destined to become one of the largest iron and steel casting concerns in the nation.

Most of the manufacturing operations for the infant concern were established in the old Erie County Penitentiary. Having seen this class of labor utilized by the Hayden and Holmes Company at Auburn in his

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

youth, Mr. Letchworth entered into an arrangement with the County Board of Supervisors and installed equipment in the prison and furnished supervision.

Prisoners who sojourned but for ninety days received only fifty cents per day. Those whose terms were of longer duration were classed as experienced help and received one dollar per day. For many years the painting, assembling and finishing of the saddlery ware was accomplished in this manner.

In 1852 additional facilities became necessary and the Pratt & Letchworth shop was moved from Main Street to the Terrace, in a building adjoining the Pratt & Company hardware store. The young firm progressed rapidly and within five years there were over 250 men employed in the production and sale of hames and coach hardware.

The passing of time saw the brothers of Mr. Letchworth associating themselves with the business in various capacities. An elder brother, Edward Letchworth, became importantly connected with the firm in 1849, and although he remained with the concern all his life, he never became a partner.

A younger brother Josiah Letchworth, came to Buffalo from Auburn, New York, several years later. He also had been employed with the Hayden and Holmes Saddlery Company in Auburn, and had gained his apprenticeship at an early age. He became associated at once with his brother William, in the factory of Pratt & Letchworth. During his early career with the concern, Josiah was actively engaged in supervisory capacities. In later years he became Treasurer and a director, and was prominently identified with the business until his death in 1913. Josiah was the father of Geoffrey J. Letchworth, Sr., who is an officer of the present company. (UNTIL 1952)

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

THE FIRST PRATT AND LETCHWORTH FOUNDRY

With a view to increasing their manufacturing facilities, the concern purchased property in 1854 in the Black Rock section of Buffalo, between Tonawanda Street and Scajaquada Creek, near the busy shops of the Buffalo Rolling Mill and Iron Works. The property was formerly occupied by the old Buffalo Car Company, which was engaged in the building of railway cars and coaches.

The old shop was converted into an iron and brass foundry for the production of hames, saddlery and coach ware. The original structures were located on the site of the present Armor Finishing unit of the Pratt & Letchworth Company plant. The only rail facilities available at that time was the spur track across Tonawanda Street maintained by the Buffalo, Lockport and Rochester Railroad Company, now the New York Central Railroad. A great deal of shipping was done by the use of canal boats which plied up Scajaquada Creek to the docks in the rear of the plant.

The first foundry at Black Rock was called the Pratt & Letchworth Manufactory. The store on Terrace Street, in lower Buffalo, continued under the name of Pratt & Letchworth. It was not until about 1860 that the name of the foundry was changed to that of the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works. The same year saw the building of another foundry by Pratt & Letchworth next to the first shop. This was called the Buffalo Steel Company.

Data reveals that in about 1850, experiments were made in Buffalo by the Messrs. Davock and Bristol, in an effort to develop the manufacture of black-hearth malleable iron. The experimants were not very successful at the time but in 1860 the Pratt & Letchworth Foundry developed a fair grade of malleable iron and were the first to introduce its manufacture on acommercial scale in Buffalo. The development of this better grade of iron led to the gradual changeover of many brass and cast iron articles to this material

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

The development of the railroads brought the growth of substantial industries in the country and a wider market for malleable iron castings became apparent. The combined works of Pratt & Company, and Pratt & Letchworth were of vast importance to users of iron and metal products in the eastern and southern States.

A commentary of that day said of the foundry industry -

"It is satisfactorily demonstrated that iron manufacture will not only pay, but pay well, in this vicinity and on the completion of the Buffalo and Pittsburgh Railroad, we may look for a large increase in this lucrative branch of business."

Of considerable interest is the following copy of a general sales letter sent to the trade by Pratt & Letchwoth Company in Spptember,1857.

Dear Sir:

We take pleasure in once more directing your attention to our complete and finely assorted stock of saddlery, coach and trunk trimmings and as the period during which you have generally made arrangements for your Fall purchases is now nigh at hand, we would respectfully solicit an examination of our goods before negotiating elsewhere.

We feel no hesitation in asserting that we can make it materially to your advantage to favor us with your future trade. Through the introduction of new and improved machinery and decline in price of raw material, we are able to make a very liberal discount on our goods generally.

We would also call your attention to an extensive assortment of imported goods, comprising a great variety of new and desirable patterns of snaffles, etc.

Should you not purpose going East this Fall, please favor us with your orders, which shall receive the same care and attention as though delivered by yourself personally.

Respectfully yours,

PRATT & LETCHWORTH

34 Terrace Street

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

THE PRATT INDUSTRIES

Buffalo was fast becoming a city of diversified industries. Trade and commerce flourished between 1850 and 1860 and the population increased from 42,000 to over 81,000. The advent of the railroads and the development of canal and lake shipping facilities, did much to stimulate this rapid growth. The city branched out and soon the little village of Black Rock, to the north of Buffalo and on the Erie Canal, became a desirable manufacturing location.

It was here that Pascal P. Pratt acquired and constructed manufacturing properties, not far from the present location of the Pratt & Letchworth plant. These interests while operated as separate establishments, were remotely associated with the firm of Pratt & Letchworth, being only a part of the financial investments of the Messrs. Pratt.

Demand for metals and hardware had taxed all available sources and the need for facilities to satisfy the demand led to the purchase in 1857, by Pascal P. Pratt, of the Buffalo Rolling Mill and Iron Works.

The rolling mill was the first of its kind to be erected in the Buffalo district. It was built in 1846 by Corns and Company of Pittsburgh, and was located opposite the foot of Forest Avenue on the old Erie Canal.

In 1859, Mr. Pratt build an addition to this plant. The combined shops then became known as the Buffalo Iron and Nail Works and occupied the wide area between the creek and the Erie Canal, north of Forest Avenue. The stone foundations of the shop may still be seen at this point.

The plants consisted of several buildings made of wood and roofed with iron and slate. They housed sixteen iron puddling furnaces, nine heating furnaces, seven trains of iron rolls, and fifty nail and forming machines. There was also a large blacksmith and millwright shop and an immense boiler house.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

These works were among the largest of their kind in the world at that time and over 500 men were employed. Large steam engines provided the motive power for the ponderous operating machinery. Both railroad and canal facilities were utilized in the shipping and receiving of materials.

Various sizes of bar iron, nails, wrought iron spikes, band iron and iron plate were manufactured. The annual consumption of coal was about 14,000 tons. Approximately 3,000 cords of wood, 8,000 tons of pig, scrap and bloom iron, and about 600 tons of iron ore were used yearly by the two plants. The management erected many small cottages near the works for the convenience of the men and their families. The community organized their own fire brigade and a fire engine was furnished by the Company.

THE FLETCHER PRATT BLAST FURNACE

In the spring of 1864, the firm of Pratt and Company "blew in" their Fletcher furnace, which was situated at Black Rock opposite the foot of Hertel Avenue, between the Niagara River and the Erie Canal. The location of the furnace and works was extremely advantageous, as lake and canal boats laden with ore, coal and limestone, had easy access to the company's extensive docks.

The plant covered twelve acres of land and in addition to marine facilities, the old New York Central Railroad ran a spur track to the works. Black Band Iron Ore, from which special pig iron was made, and bituminous coal, was shipped in from McKean County, Pa.

The Fletcher blast furnace was an immense circular structure of stone and brick reinforced by large iron hoops. The coal, ore and limestone, was raised to the top of the furnace by a huge water balance. Large steam pumps were used to lift the water for the hoisting mechanism. The steam used by the pumps and the air blast machinery was generated solely by

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

the hot gases from the furnace in an ingenious arrangement of six boilers.

The furnace had a capacity for making about 85 tons of pig iron daily. The iron was used mainly at the shops of the Buffalo Iron and Nail Works and the rolling mills at the foot of Forest Avenue. For many years it was the chief source of pig iron for the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works and the Buffalo Steel Company, operated by Pratt & Letchworth.

A publication of 1866 contained the following statement regarding the Fletcher furnace.

> "The most remarkable success attended this furnace. Up to the present time, there has not been a cessation of operations for a single hour since it was first blown in, nor any accident to its machinery or apparatus has happened involving an expense of ten cents. It is probably the most complete furnace in the world. These enterprising gentlemen, we understand, contemplate the erection of still another furnace during the coming year."

During this era the city of Buffalo and particularly the Black Rock Section grew rapidly. Many new industries settled here to take advantage of the splendid manufacturing and transportation facilities. An expression often heard in those days was,-"I wonder what will be the next railroad to come into Buffalo?"

Large freight shipments were common and Buffalo soon became one of the largest railroad centers in the country. This caused an ever increasing demand for iron and steel products and the successive expansion of the Pratt Companies and the first of Pratt & Letchworth.

PRIZE WINNING EXHIBIT IN 1869

At the First International Exhibition held in the Skating Rink at Pearl and Niagara Streets in Buffalo, in October, 1869, many samples of Buffalo made products and craftsmanship were displayed. Both Pratt & Letchworth and Pratt & Company contributed individually to the exhibits and

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

donated $100 each to the promotional fund.

Pratt & Letchworth received a Medal and a Certificate of Facts for their exhibit of saddlery and harness ware. Among the many articles which received first order of merit were: Improved wire bits, rein holders, concord hames, patent snaffles, harness snaps, patent gig trees, and samples of malleable iron castings.

Pratt and Company received numerous awards for their displays of railroad track accessories and various metal products made at their Buffalo Iron and Nail Works.

THE SECOND PRATT BLAST FURNACE

An idea of the immensity of the transactions of the various plants controlled by the Pratt interests is noted by the aggregate sales in the year 1872, of over $3,000,000. In addition to the rolling mills, one of the most lucrative interests was the Fletcher Blast Furnace Plant which operated without cessation for many years.

In 1874, Pascal P. Pratt built a second Fletcher Blast furnace on the shore of the Niagara River near North Tonawanda, N.Y. This plant was the forerunner of the present Tonawanda Iron Company owned by the American Radiator Company. A small community grew up around the works and was called Ironton. The operation of this plant did not prove very profitable to the company and it was closed in 1885.

The same year saw the closing of the first Pratt furnace due to labor trouble and it was leased to outside operators. The same difficulties forced the closing of the mills at the foot of Forest Avenue. Soon thereafter these plants were disposed of by Pascal P. Pratt.

In 1889, the late Frank B. Baird, Buffalo industrialist, obtained an option on the long-dormant Pratt furnace in Tonawanda. Mr. Baird, together with the Rogers, Brown and Company, of Cincinnati, organized the Tonawanda Iron and Steel Company. The next year, William A. Rogers, now

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

↓ (DECEASED)

a retired Buffalo industrialist, took over active management of the plant.

It is interesting to note the prominent men who believed in the potential possibilities of iron manufacture at that time. Among the incorporators of the company operating the rehabilitated second Fletcher furnace were a Mr. Archer Brown, editor of the old Cincinnati Gazette; Mr. Rogers, Frank B. Baird, George P. Smith, Benjamin L. Rand, and James H. DeGraff. Prominent stockholders were William and David Gamble of the Procter and Gamble soap interests.

In 1896 this same company erected a $250,000 furnace on the same site and its first fire was started by an electric spark touched off by the hand of President-elect William McKinley from his home in Canton, Ohio. The new furnace was called the Niagara Furnace and the event was publicized throughout the United States and Europe as the plant then had a combined capacity of over 600 tons of pig iron daily.

PASCAL P. PRATT SELLS PARTNERSHIP

Pascal P. Pratt had disposed of his holdings in Pratt and Company, at the Terrace Street location early in 1886. At the same time, Wilbridge & Company acquired the shelf stocks and miscellaneous hardware for their own store.

The partnership of Pratt & Company did not actually dissolve until March 30, 1886, at which time the assets were acquired by Edward P. Beals, who had been a junior partner. Mr. Beals and David E. Brown formed a new partnership and occupied the same quarters at the Terrace, being known as Beals and Brown. The firm of Beals, McCarthy & Rogers is an after-developement, and carry on an extensive hardware business in the original buildings to this day. The Pratt & Letchworth Hame and Saddlery Store continued to do business in the building until 1891.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

PRATT INTERESTS ACQUIRED BY LETCHWORTHS

Since the establishment of the manufactory at Black Rock in 1854 and up to the time of the incorporation, the Pratt Family was not actively connected with the operations of the Pratt & Letchworth foundries except financially.

Samuel Fletcher Pratt, the elder of the two brothers, passed away in 1873 and his interests were acquired soon after by Josiah Letchworth.

Pascal P. Pratt, had become one of Buffalo's most prominent business men and foremost citizens. His business interests were varied and far-flung. In 1856 he founded the Manufacturers and Traders Bank of Buffalo. He was a member of numerous clubs, civic and fraternal organizations and wasone of the charter members of the Buffalo Club. Mr. Pratt died in 1905.

WILLIAM PRYOR LETCHWORTH RETIRES

It was not many years after the company established foundry operations at Black Rock that William P. Letchworth spent considerable time in retirement. His brothers were quite capably managing the business affairs of the company. The staff had been strenghtened in 1863 by the addition of several of his close friends, and the demands on his time were continually lessened.

Soon after retiring, Mr. Letchworth purchased a beautiful expanse of property embracing Genesee Falls in NewYork State. This picturesque spot he named "Glen Iris". Within it was a veritable preserve of wild life and natural beauty.

Much of the remainder of Mr. Letchworth's life was spent on this estate. His years in retirement were occupied almost wholly with charitable work which led to his appointment as President of the New York State Board of Charities. He was President of the Fine Arts Academy and was

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

influential in the organization of many educational and corrective institutions for children, and the care of the insane and aged. Mr. Letchworth spent a year in ~~Europe~~ EUROPE, which was devoted entirely to social service and charity. Mr. Letchworth wrote many papers and memoirs dealing with his work amongst charitable institutions. He also composed considerable verse and poetry, the inspiration for which he attributed to the beauty of his vast estate. In 1874 he completed a book on "The Life of Samuel F. Pratt and the Pratt Family" for the Buffalo Historical Society.

Although age and ill health kept him confined a great deal in later years, he managed to remain in advisory capacity to many organizations. In February, 1893, he received an honorary degree of LL.D. from the University of the State of New York in recognition of his distinquished services to the State in social work.

Through the medium of a State created body known as the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, Mr. Letchworth deeded and dedicated Glen Iris to the people of the State for the purposes of a reservation and public park. This gift to the people is now known as Letchworth Park. Mr. Letchworth died in December, 1910.

PRATT & LETCHWORTH EXPANDS

A fourth brother, George Jedediah Letchworth, had come to Buffalo in 1876. George was an experienced saddlery hardware craftsman as he had been a member of the firm of Hayden & Holmes in Auburn, N.Y.

His career with Pratt & Letchworth was not very prominent, although he eventually became a partner and General Manager. In 1887, upon his death, his interests were acquired by his son, Ogden Pearl Letchworth, who had come to Buffalo with him.

At this time William P. Letchworth has been in partial retirement. Josiah Letchworth also had retired from active participation in

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

the company's affairs ten years previously. Upon George(s death it became necessary for Josiah to again assume the management of the firm until its incorporation in 1896.

In the meantime Ogden P. Letchworth had advanced thru the various operating departments of the plant to the position of General Manager. As his father and uncles before him, he had gained an early training in the saddlery and hame business in Auburn. His génius and executive ability had much to do with the successive expansion of the company.

THE BUFFALO STEEL COMPANY

With the opening of the country west of the Mississippi, demand for iron and steel materials became acute. Production in the iron foundry of Pratt & Letchworth, known as the Buffalo Malleable Iron Works, forced expansion of the shop. Small quantities of cast brass were made in crucibles and used primarily in the manufacture of hame and saddlery fixtures.

Steel was in the process of developement in this country and was fast gaining recognition as a better metal for various applications.

The first steel foundry unit of the Pratt & Letchworth works was known as the Buffalo Steel Company and was built on the site of the present steel foundry in 1861.. While no authentic records exist in the files of the company at the present time, it is known that crucible steel was the first steel made in the works. History records that steel was made by no other method in this country at that time. Although this fact is not definitely certified, sufficient data has been found to permit the present company to assume the position of having been the first steel casting foundry to operate on a commercial scale in the United States. It is certain that the Pratt & Letchworth works was the first steel foundfy on the Niagara Frontier. One authority quotes the fact that a form of blister steel was made

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

in clay crucibles in this country in about 1837. Should this be true, it would indicate that in the interim between 1837 and 1861, not much progress was made in the development of a crucible steel.

The American Iron and Steel Associate Directory, published in 1908, states the Buffalo Steel Company produced crucible steel in 1861 and acid open-hearth steel as early as 1876. Various other records found in the Buffalo Grosvenor Library and the Buffalo Historical Society tend to corroborate this data. More credence is lent to this data by an article recently published regarding the active participation of Pascal P. Pratt and William P. Letchworth, in the construction of the first steam locomotive built in Buffalo at the David Bell Steam Engine Shops, at the close of the Civil War.

From the testimony furnished by former and present employees of the Company, it has been definitely proved that a metal known as McHaffey Steel was produced in the shops soon after the advent of crucible steel and prior to the development of open hearth steel in 1876. The quality of McHaffey steel was controlled by the amount of specially imported Scotch pig iron used in the melt. This type of steel was produced in coal-fired cupolas which were tapped intermittently and poured entirely by hand from small bull ladles.

BUFFALO'S FIRST OPEN HEARTH FURNACE

It is well established that the first open-hearth steel furnace on the Niagara Frontier was constructed in the Buffalo Steel Company, owned and operated by Pratt & Letchworth. This furnace was of 15-ton capacity and was in operation in 1876, employing the use of double checkers and gas for fuel. The steel was poured from a three-ton bottom pour ladle which was suspended from a steam-motivated swinging jib crane; the molds being arranged on a circular conveyor.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

Instrumental in the later development of open-hearth furnaces in the works was Edward C. Strong, who later became identified with the Strong Steel Foundry and who is now an official of the Atlas Steel Casting Company of Buffalo. DECEASED

During these years of development in the manufacture of ferrous metals, the business of Pratt & Letchworth continued to grow apace with commerce. The demand for iron and steel castings for commercial use and railroad use was widespread. Pratt & Letchworth castings were being shipped to almost all parts of the world. Considerable quantities were sent to England, Germany, Australia, and the Orient.

THE MANUFACTURE OF TOYS AND NOVELTIES

From 1890 to 1894 a production side line of the Buffalo Malleable Iron Company was the manufacture of cast toys and miniature figures of animals and novelties made of malleable iron and brass.

The toys were conceived by an expert designer and were made for the Schwartz Toy Store of New York City.

This venture proved to be a profitable outlet for malleable iron and in 1894 the sale of tys amounted to over $200,000. The fact that toy business was seasonal soon forced abandonment of this enterprise.

An unusal sideline of manufacture which was inaugurated by Ogden P. Letchworth in order to utilize vacant space, was the production of a "Scientific brace", or type of suspender for men. This was a complicated arrangement of elastic straps and buckles. Apparently no great market was available as it was soon discarded.

In addition to these novelties the firm also marketed a folding kite. This was supposed to have been an innovation for kite flyers and was a type which required no tail. The frame was of wood and was covered by a waterproof resilient material, the whole of which folded into compact

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

form when not in use. This novelty remained on the market but a short while.

Many other sidelines were considered by the company in an effort to stabilize production and offset seasonal slumps. Another item of manufacture was the corrugated fastener or staple. The patent was purchased from the original owner and Pratt & Letchworth was the first company to install automatic machinery for the manufacture of staples. The patent was later sold to a nail company.

HUMOROUS SALES PAMPHLET ISSUED

In the Spring of 1896 an amusing trade catalog was issued from the sales department of the Pratt & Letchowrth Company. It had a very lengthy title and was unique in composition. It was purported to be "A Lecture Upon a Remarkable Example of American Developments and Processes in the Production of Hematite Malleable Iron and Steel Castings."

It was supposed to have been delivered before the British Society of Uncivil Engineers by Sir Ponsonby Hawkesworth, A.R.A., K.C.B., etc., who upon his return to England, after a visit to the Pratt & Letchworth works reports the results of his investigations.

His description of the systematic methods in their office work, of the busy superintendent going the rounds in his private carriage and dispensing his orders thru mounted couriers to his subordinates, was quite colorful and informative. He tells of seeing molding rooms of mosaic floors, of the walls covered with works of art and of the molders attired in full dress.

Full instructions as to the methods of segregation by which blow-holes were disposed of and a unique method of eliminating sulphur and phosphorus from the melt by hypodermic injections, was worthy of any foundryman's attention.

In speaking of the fact that malleable iron was unknown to the ancients, he quoted Julius Caesar as saying, when he was preparing his

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

campaign in Gaul: "Now if I only had a piece of malleable iron." He was a keen observer and an accurate reporter, but was very weak as a classicist, as the original works of Caesar read thusly, "Oh, that I had a set of semi-steel knuckles with which to smash the face of Helvetii."

Thousands of copies of this amusing booklet were sent out by request and wide comment was aroused. Unlike most humorous trade circulars, this one was successful as an advertising medium for quite sometime.

INCORPORATION OF PRATT & LETCHWORTH

The expiration of partnership by limitation actually occurred in 1893, however, it was not until January 11, 1896, that the firm took corporate form and became a stock company with a capital of $300,000. The works then became Pratt & Letchworth Company, Incorporated.

The executive officers of the new company were: Ogden P. Letchworth, President and General Manager; and Josiah Letchworth, Secretary and Treasurer. At that time the corporation purchased the interests of William Pryor Letchworth and Pascal P. Pratt.

The organization of the corporate stock company marked the advent of a long series of changes in operating personnel and executive staff, which greatly affected the future of the company.

GRANT STREET LAND COMPANY

Immediately after the incorporation it was decided timely to dispose of excess property and lands owned by the Pratt & Letchworth Company in the vicinity of the Black Rock Works. Accordingly, there was set up an agency known as the Grant Street Land Company and the land was divided into lots.

The property covered the large area just north of Forest Avenue bordered on one side by Scajaquada Creek and on the west by Grant Street, and on the south by a point just south of Amherst Street. Most of the land had formerly been marshland and had been filled in almost entirely

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

by foundry refuse. The remainder was part of the vast holdings of the Pratt estate.

The present Bradley Street and Letchworth Street which were part of the property were named after officials of the company at that time. After the death of Josiah Letchworth, the last piece of property was sold and is now owned by the Buffalo Structural Steel Company on Letchworth Street.

PRATT & LETCHWORTH PLANTS ELECTRIFIED

The malleable iron foundry of the Pratt & Letchworth Company was the first of its kind to be entirely equipped with electricity. With the advent of cheap electric power directly from Niagara Falls, it was decided to completely electrify the plant and discard the costly steam engines which had formerly supplied power to several small generators. Previously only a few cranes in the shops had been electrically motivated.

When the task was completed President Letchworth made elaborate arrangements for a public reception and tour thru the plant. This took place on Saturday, December 30, 1899. Many notables were present and promptly at noon, Mr. J. C. Bradley, the General Superintendent, uncoupled the old steam engine and turned on the current from Niagara Falls. This was followed by a day of celebration and a New Year's Party for the employees and their families held at one of the large Buffalo hotels.

PROPOSED CONSOLIDATION OF MALLEABLE FOUNDRIES

The two decades before 1900 heralded the rapid expansion of industry and the railroads. During these years the manufacture of iron and steel products became one of the most important enterprises in the nation. Illustrative of the great demand for railway equipment is the fact that between 1896 and 1916 railway freight business increased 260 percent.

The Pratt and Letchworth Company had become one of the largest foundries in the country and under President Ogden P. Letchworth it had assumed the leadership in policies affecting the trade. At that time

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considerable thought was given by various foundries to a proposal for banding together for the standardization of price policies and mutual cooperative effort.

In 1902, Mr. Letchworth entered into negtiations with a group of foundrymen with a view to organizing a combine of 18 malleable iron foundrie with a capital of $20,000,000. The combine was to have been sponsored by the U. S. Steel Corporation and financed by the J. Pl Morgan Company.

A year later, before negotiations were completed, it was decided that business conditions did not warrant the launching of such a mammoth corporation at that time and the proposal was dropped. Had the negotiations been completed, Mr. Letchworth would have been the president of the corporation and the Buffalo plant of Pratt & Letchworth would have been the home office.

THE UNITED HAME COMPANY IS FORMED

The successive growth of the Pratt & Letchworth business made it necessary to segregate the production of hame, saddlery, and coach fixtures, from the foundry units. As mentioned previously, the hame and carriage fixtures made by the firm, were shipped to the Erie County Penitentiar which was equipped to finish and assemble the parts using prison labor. The articles were then sold and distributed, through the Pratt & Letchworth store on Lower Terrace Street.

This practice continued until January 1, 1887, when the contract with the Erie County Board of Supervisors for prison labor was terminated. Considerable study had been given to the questionable economies derived from prison labor and it was found that 250 men at the factory could accomplish more than 600 men at the prison.

With this in mind and with a view to securing much needed railway facilities, Pratt & Letchworth bought property adjacent to their malleable foundry and which was formerly occupied by a pail factory. The finishing of the hames and saddlery was immediately stated in a building on

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this property. A separate sales organization was set up, the whole unit then being known as the United Hame Company. Ogden P. Letchworth, at that time General Manager of Pratt & Letchworth, was primarily responsible for the many changes which took place in the manufacturing affiliates of this company.

The United Hame Company so dominated its particular market that it was able to purchase controlling interests in the Frazier-Jones Company of Syracuse and the Hayden Saddlery Hardware Company of Columbus, Ohio in 1897.

The latter two concerns immediately discontinued the manufacture of their saddlery hardware and production was concentrated at Buffalo. This new group of interests was continued as the United Hame Company, Ogden P. Letchworth became President and officials of the associated concerns became officers and directors.

A nationwide selling organization was built up, many of the agencies of which exist today; The buildings and machinery formerly used by Pratt & Letchworth for the manufacture of hames was leased to the United Hame Company and the production of hames and saddlery was increased.

For the purpose of enlarging still further its operations so as to be able to meet the keep competition on these goods in other parts of the country, it was deemed expedient at that time to establish a branch plant at some southern point. This move brought about the absorption of the business of Herman Brothers Company, at Tell City, Indiana.

In order to extend its foreign market, which would necessitate having a factory near the seaboard, the plants of the Consolidated Hame Company located at Andover and Sunapee, N.H., were consolidated with the already acquired interests of the Pratt & Letchworth owned United Hame Company.

When the negotiations were completed in August, 1902, the United Hame Company increased its capital stock from $10,000 to $1,600,000 and became the United States Hame Company. Ogden P. Letchworth continued as

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President as he had been the leading spirit in bringing about the consolidation. The main offices were in Buffalo and the city soon became the center of the world's hame and saddlery industry.

On August 22, 1902, the U.S. Hame Company bought three and a half acres of property from the Pratt & Letchworth Company. The sale included the engines, boilers and machinery in the buildings on the land. The deed recorded the consideration as one dollar, and was signed by Ogden P. Letchworth. Stipulation was made in the deed that the Pratt & Letchworth Company retain the right to operate the railroad tracks thru the property. This agreement is in effect to the present day.

This transaction formally marked the end of hame and saddlery hardware manufacture by the Pratt & Letchworth Company. From that time on the Hame Company was commonly referred to as "The other side". Although for a number of years, or until Mr. Letchwowrth's retirement in 1911, the clerical work and bookkeeping for the company was done by the staff of the Pratt & Letchworth office.

The business of the U.S. Hame Company necessitated a new brass foundry and a large addition was made to the plant. Facilities were also available for the manufacture of an all-iron coach hame.

This affiliate organization controlled by the Pratt & Letchworth Company manufactured eighty-five percent of the hames produced in this country. The annual output in 1907 was about 2,000,000 pairs. The ordinary life of a pair of hames was from ten to twenty years, according to the severity of the usage given them.

To the ordinary observer, a hame was simply an important part of a work harness. It did not seem possible that there could be so many different styles or varieties in hames; however, within a period of sixty days in 1907, over 500 different kinds were shipped.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

There were hames designed for the smallest mule not much larger than a goat, up to those which were suitable for the largest draught horses. Hames were also made for oxen. These were shipped chiefly to the far northwest. Many of the higher priced hames were elaborately finished, with brass or silverplated trimmings.

The products of this Letchworth enterprise received the highest awards at the World's Fair, the Paris Exposition, the Pan-American Exposition, and at the St. Louis Exposition.

It was during this period that Pratt & Letchworth and the United States Hame Company jointly owned a vast tract of timber new Muskegon, Michigan. A large camp was maintained and all the special woods for the hames and other uses were prepared and shipped to Buffalo by boat thru the lakes and thence to the docks in the rear of the Hame plant. The company leased a fleet of barges which plied the canal and lakes to facilitate cheap transportation of their goods.

It was during the year 1891 that Augustus Dorries, an employee of the United Hame Company, bought the retail business of the Pratt & Letchworth Hame and Saddlery store, which had been continued on Terrace Street. It was then moved to Washington Street and later to Ellicott and North Division Streets in Buffalo.

In 1914 Mr. Dorries sold the establishment to a life-long friend and associate, who operates the business to the present day. The store is now known as Dorries Company Inc. and deals in wholesale saddlery and harness, and other hardware.

EXHIBITION OF PRODUCTS

Whenever an opportunity became present wherein a display or exhibit of castings might be appropriate, President Letchworth participated to the fullest extent.

In 1893, the firm exhibited patented railway devices and

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

castings at the Chicago World's Fair. These castings consisted of Pooley Couplers or malleable iron, also malleable car castings of various descriptions.

At the Pan-American Exposition held in Buffalo in 1902, the company erected a very extensive and elegant display depicting the progress of the railroads and exhibited various railway castings in the booth.

The company contributed financially to the St. Louis World's Fair Fund in 1903 and sent an exhibit of miscellaneous castings to the Exposition.

For many years the company exhibited locomotive castings and various agricultural implement castings at the Toronto Fair. The display usually consisted of castings which were made by the company for Canadian buyers.

PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC AFFAIRS

A gun squad was organized by President Letchworth in about 1890. It was composed of employees from the Hame plant and the Pratt & Letchworth plant who drilled regularly in parade tactics. They were called the Pratt & Letchworth Gun Squad and were used by Mr. Letchworth at all civic and election parades.

They also used a small brass cannon which was specially cast and made in the plant. This was pulled along wherever they went and used in firing of salutes. The marchers carried red, white and blue lanterns and wore gaily colored uniforms. The gun squad disbanded in 1900.

In 1903 a group of employees from "Letchworth Colony", as the combined works of the Hame Company and Pratt & Letchworth were commonly referred to in those days, banded together and organized a fife and drum corps. They were 29 in number and were known as the Pratt & Letchworth Fife and Drum Corps.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

Mr. Letchworth provided them with gay uniforms, instruments, and instructors. The band was under the command of Ezra Arkland and was at all times available for picnics, patriotic festivals, parades, and many other occasions.

Mr. Letchworth had a great fancy for entertaining visiting notables. The story is told that during the visit of Theodore Roosevelt to Buffalo in 1903, Mr. Letchworth arranged to have the train pass by the tracks adjacent to the plant on the way into Buffalo from Niagara Falls.

The train stopped at the Black Rock Station across the street from the works and the candidate was welcomed by the Fife and Drum Corps with Mr. Letchworth and a group of civic officials. The big brass cannon was fired in salute, all of which Mr. Roosevelt enthusiastically acknowledged.

Wherever the band played, the cannon was used in accompaniment. The band was an object of pride to Mr. Letchworth and was continued for many years after his retirement.

EXCELLENT EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

An illustration of the extent to which the management concerned themselves with the well being and comfort of their works is the soup kitchen which the company installed in 1901.

At a meeting of the National Founders Association, President Letchworth conceived the idea and with the concurrence of the Directors, immediately took steps to inaugurate the kitchen which was located in the rear of the present office building. The same quarters were occupied in part by the Pratt & Letchworth Men's Club.

At lunch time the men formed in an orderly line and received their ~~victuals~~ Food in a designated section of open foundry space where they sat about and visited. The company was the first institution of its kind to establish such a kitchen and it had a capacity for serving 100 gallons of

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

soup a day.

In lieu of money, the workers had the privilege of buying quantities of small colored chips which were used in payment for their food. A red chip marked three cents on one side and the Pratt & Letchworth emblem on the other, entitled one to a quart of soup; a black chip marked one cent, was used for a bowl of coffee; and a white two-cent chip paid for a quarter of a loaf of bread.

The spirit of good fellowship which prevailed among the supervisory personnel was evidenced in the club rooms provided for them by the management. The group was know as the P and L Men's Club and many facilities were provided for their enjoyment during off hours..

Billiard and pool tables were available and a piano was a well used part of the furnishings. There was also a dining hall and a reading room with a library of 1000 volumes, which was furnished by Josiah Letchworth. Each New Year's day for many years it was the custom of President O. P. Letchworth to entertain all the men, together with their wives and sweethearts.

Of particular interest is the following excerpt from a civic publication of 1908 in respect to the good will and public relations which the company enjoyed among its employees and the people in Buffalo.

> "The Pratt & Letchworth plants are known far beyond their home confines as model institutions, where labor troubles are unknown and where employees, and employers enjoy a material bond that tends to the betterment of both. Nothing is left undone that will contribute to the health, comfort and general welfare of the hundreds working beneath their roofs. Frequent excursions and outing parties are afforded the employees and the Pratt & Letchworth field day has come to be known as one of the merriest of Niagara River holidays. (These outings were for years held jointly with the U. S. Hame Company).
>
> "The Pratt & Letchworth shops always present a pleasing prospect, with well-kept lawn, flower beds and landscape effects. In all respects, the Buffalo Plant is a model one, the lines of which are being copies by great manufacturing concerns all over the world".

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

ORGANIZED STEEL FOUNDERS SOCIETY

Mr. Letchworth had the honor of being the first President and organizer of the Steel Founders' Society of America. Although the Society is considered as having been organized in 1902, it was not actually constituted as an association until 1907. Prior to that it was nothing more than an informal club meeting at regular intervals in New York City.

It was at the meeting of July 11, 1907, that the Pratt & Letchworth Company became a charter member and Mr. Letchworth the first president of the Society. Since that time the company has been actively identified with the work of the Society.

BRANCH PLANT IN CANADA

The demand for castings and railway equipment in Canada grew very rapidly and so as to better satisfy the Canadian needs the company authorized President Letchworth to lease the old Grand Trunk Railroad Car Shops in Brantford, Ontario, in 1900 and equip the plant for a capacity of 4,000 tons of malleable iron castings per year.

The branch plant in Canada expanded and by 1908 over 1,000 men were employed. Production was under the supervision of personnel from the Buffalo plant. Its castings supplied most of the requirements of the railroads and car builders in Canada. Large quantities of agricultural implements were made as there was a vast market for such products in Canada.

In 1911 the plant was incorporated under the laws of the Province of Ontario as a limited Corporation and became known as the Pratt & Letchworth Company, Limited. The works enjoyed an enviable reputation in the Dominion and contributed greatly to the growth and prosperity of Brantford. In 1913 the plant was sold to the Canadian Car and Foundry Company, Ltd., who now operate the works.

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OPERATING CHANGES AND EXPANSION

The turn of the century marked the beginning of many changes in operating personnel and manufacturing facilities. Many of the personalities who guided the destinies of the Pratt & Letchworth Company thru the years had passed on or retired, although some are still in active connection with the organization. Several important changes occurred prior to the retirement of Ogden P. Letchworth from active participation in the affairs of the company, which had a very definite bearing on the future of the company. The important changes began in 1901 when John C. Bradley, then General Superintendent, and William C. Houck, Secretary, became directors of the company. At the same time Pierre E. Letchworth, son of Josiah, became assistant secretary. A year later, Franklin V. Locke, legal adviser for the firm, became a Vice President.

Willis M. Edwards, who was Cashier, became Assistant Treasurer in 1905. At that time, J. C. Bradley resigned his position, but continued as a member of the directorate. He went to New York City where he became insterested in the chemical drug business.

C. W. Sherman was elected a director and appointed General Superintendent of the entire plant which was continually being enlarged. The same year William C. Houck, retired as Secretary and Director and was succeeded by Willis M. Edwards, who was elected Secretary and Assistant Treasurer. Mr. Sherman remained with the company until 1912 at which time he became interested in organizing the Adirondack Steel Foundry and the Dominion Steel Foundry of Hamilton, Ontario.

Ogden P. Letchworth retired as president of the company in 1911 and spent considerable time in touring Europe. After Mr. Sherman had left the company, J. C. Bradley was recalled and appointed general manager of the plants and president of the Board of Directors.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

Pierre E. Letchworth had resigned as a director and was succeeded on the board by his brother, Geoffrey J. Letchworth, who was Purchasing Agent at the time.

The venerable Josiah Letchworth passed away in 1913 and Willis M. Edwards was elected treasurer and a director in his place and J. H. Bradley, the son, was made assistant secretary.

For several years there were no major changes. J. H. Bradley assume the title of General Manager in March 1917, when it was relinquished by his father. John C. Bradley was named Chairman of the Board and J. H. Bradley became President in 1920. John P. Williams was elected second Vice President at the same time, to succeed George P. Warner, Sales Manager.

Probably the only person outside of the Hon. William Pryor Letchworth, who made possible the successive growth of the Pratt & Letchworth Company to its present status, was the latter's nephew, Ogden Pryor Letchworth.

During his colorful career, Mr. Letchworth was prominently connected and identified with numerous organizations. For many years, he was President of the National Founders' Association, the Steel Founders' Society and the United States Hame Company. He was a vice president of the Frazer-Jones Company and the Solvay Foundry Company, both of Syracuse.

In addition to his executive positions, he was a member of the directorate of the Great Lakes Engineering Works of Detroit; the Manufacturers and Traders Bank, two insurance companies, and several charitable institutions. He was also a member of nine clubs and fraternal organizations. Mr. Letchworth died in retirement in February, 1939.

An important change in the history of the company came about in June, 1923, when the control of the Pratt & Letchwath Company was purchased by the Dayton Malleable Iron Company of Ohio. After negotiations were complete, the Buffalo plant continued to operate as a separate organization.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

RAILROAD EQUIPMENT BUSINESS

In addition to the executive abilities of the many persons who have been or are now connected with the Pratt & Letchworth organization, there is one very important factor which contributed greatly to the character and development of the company's business, and that is the railroad equipment industry.

Although the greater bulk of the products manufactured by the firm consists of railroad devices, castings, and coil springs, it manufactures Ordnance and commercial castings of all descriptions. The railroad equipment business was a natural development. Several decades ago as the railroads grew in structure, large equipment and car shops came into existence. Among the earliest of these concerns to emply the facilities of the Pratt & Letchworth Company, was the American Locomotive Company. For years thousands of complete sets of locmmotive castings from main frames to wheels were made in the plant.

Another of the early equipment concerns was the Franklin Railway Supply Company, now the Balmar Company, which has been a purveyor of Pratt & Letchworth Company castings for nearly 30 years. Their line of castings are used entirely in conjunction with patented locomotive devices.

Another supply house and the largest of its kind, is the W. H. Miner, Inc. of Chicago. Since 1905, when the first Miner casting was made by the Pratt & Letchworth Company, many millions of miscellaneous steel and malleable castings have been produced for their only customers, the railroads.

This company was founded by William H. Miner and thru his genius and salesmanship, it became one of the largest. The greater bulk of their castings have been made in the Buffalo plant of Pratt & Letchworth Company, where they maintain a branch office.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

The growth of industry and the advent of the first World War brought large orders for government and railroad requirements which taxed the capacity of the Pratt & Letchworth plants. It was at that time that a new and modern two-story core room was added to the malleable foundry unit. An additional open-hearth furnace was built and the steel foundry enlarged. This brought the total of open-hearth furnaces to four.

The company accepted a contract from the J. P. Morgan Company in August, 1916, for 10,000 tons of high explosive sheet steel for the British Government. These castings were 12-inch octagonal shaped billets and weight about 1000 lbs. finished.

The order ran for nearly a year and a total of 531 heats of steel had been poured, when the war ended and the contract was terminated before completion.

During the first World War, hundreds of sets of locomotive castings were made for the American Locomotive Company. The requirements for these castings were very rigid and representatives from France, England and Russia, for whom many of the locomotives were being built, were stationed in the plant for the duration of the work.

PLANT FACILITIES INCREASED

After the First World War was over and industry settled down, the market for automobiles and durable goods grew by leaps and bounds. Facilities all over the nation were utilized, and more were built. During this period the company decided to erect the huge new malleable foundry building, now the Armor Finishing Shop. This was in 1918 and without interrupting production the new structure was built over the top of the old buildings.

When in operation the foundry had a capacity for the manufacture of 2000 tons of malleable castings monthly and was the finest equipped in the world.

THE BUFFALO HISTORY MUSEUM

After considerable study and research, the management decided in 1928 to install a spring plant. Within a year, one of the most modern helical coil spring shops in the industry had been constructed and was in operation, the entire system being automatically and pyrometrically controlled.

The drop forge plant of the company started production in August 1932 This shop has been enlarged primarily in the production of component parts for railway shock absorbing devices.

Facilities of the Pratt & Letchworth plants are constantly undergoing modernization. Competition and mechanical progress are not alone responsible for the many additions and improvements made by the company. Requirements of car and locomotive builders and the users of industrial castings also influence plant modernization.

Low operating and production costs are essential to every business and an innovation in efficienty and economy was the installation of a gigantic sand handling system in the steel foundry.

The system is unique in that the conveyors and belts are synchronized for the handling, grading, washing, and mixing of the various molding and core sands. It includes a ventilating system, a laboratory and a vacuum cleaning system. The arrangement has been judged by experts to be one of the most efficient sand handling systems ever built, having unlimited facilities for experimentation and expansion.

During the past several years many innovations in foundry engineering have been installed in the plants.

The present works of the Pratt & Letchworth company cover an area of nearly thirty acres, over half of which are under roof. The firm draws tremendously upon the skilled and unskilled labor supply of Buffalo. A capacity for the production of thousands of tons of steel castings and armor steel castings, drop forgings, and coil springs, makes the Pratt & Letchworth Company an industry of major importance to the Niagara Frontier and one of the

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largest steel foundries in the United States.

William F. Saunders
Pratt & Letchworth Company, Inc.
Revised April, 1943

Add to revised edition.
Tank work World War II
Plant expansion - foundry and Core room bays, etc,
New 1800 ton press -
X-Ray
Electric Furnace.